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A REMINISCENCE OF A SATYR PLAY

AMONG the Etruscan antiquities in the Museum of the University of Pennsylvania is a small circular bronze mirror, 14.9 cm. in diameter, with a fine blue patina (Fig. 1). On the back, engraved in the usual fashion, are three figures. In the middle stands Heracles nude, except for the lion's skin which is tied around his neck and falls down behind his back. His right foot is advanced, and his left drawn back with the toes resting on the ground. He is leaning on his club, which he grasps with his right hand; and in his left hand, which rests at his side, he holds an object only partly visible behind the edge of the lion's

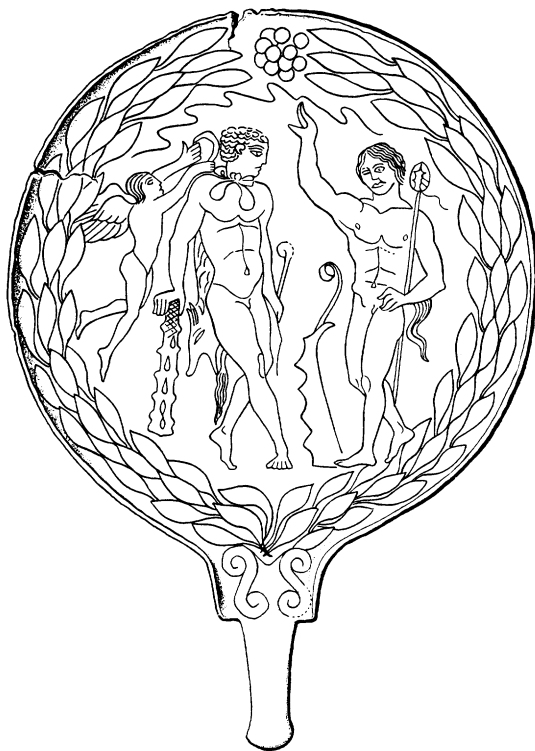


FIGURE 1.—MIRROR IN PHILADELPHIA

skin. It ends in a round knob and is apparently intended for his bow, since upon other Etruscan mirrors and upon Greek vases the ends of the bow of Heracles are often so represented.¹ Behind

¹ *E. g.*, Gerhard, *Auserlesene Griech. Vasenbilder*, I, pl. 36; *Mon. Antichi*, X, pl. 28.

Heracles is a small winged Eros, also nude, who is about to place a fillet or wreath upon the hero's head.

In front of Heracles and facing him is a youthful satyr standing with his weight supported by his left leg, while his right is drawn back so that only the toes touch the ground. His right hand is raised in theatrical fashion, as if he were addressing Heracles or remonstrating with him, and his left rests upon his hip. The position of the right hand with the thumb separated from the fingers is noteworthy. Between his left wrist and his body and leaning against his shoulder is a thyrsus, the end of which rests on the ground. His tail is visible below his left arm. Anatomical

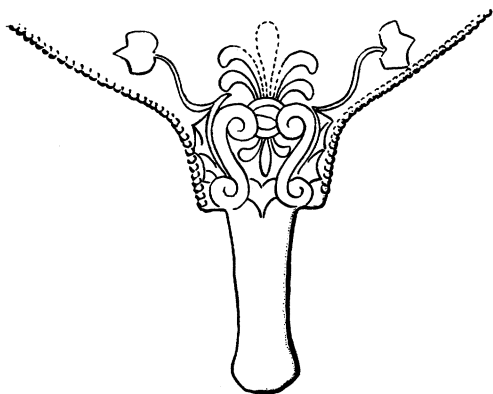


FIGURE 2.—ORNAMENT AT BASE OF HANDLE
OF MIRROR

details are indicated on the bodies of both figures. Between Heracles and the satyr is a peculiarly shaped, pointed object which I think the artist intended for the stern of a boat. So far, however, I have failed to find an exact parallel, although boats with curved stern pieces are common.

Above the heads of the figures is a wavy

line separating this scene from the border which surrounds it. The latter is in the form of a wreath consisting of a triple band of olive leaves which begin at the handle and run to the right and the left, and where the two ends would meet there is a bunch of eleven ivy berries. Below the wreath, at the base of the handle, are two spirals. The lower part of the mirror ends in a tang which was originally fitted into a handle of some other material such as ivory, wood, or leather. On the other side, at the base of the handle, is a somewhat complicated ornament (Fig. 2) consisting of two spirals, a double palmette with five leaves above and three below, and ivy tendrils, while a bead moulding runs all around the outer edge of the mirror. There is a slight break at the top, and a crack at the left side near the Eros, but otherwise the mirror is well preserved.

At first sight there seems to be nothing remarkable about this mirror. The figures are ugly, the drawing is poor, and one would naturally class it with other carelessly drawn mirrors of the third or second century B.C., but a little consideration shows that it is of greater interest than at first appears. Heracles is a common figure on Etruscan mirrors, and the same is true of satyrs, but not Heracles at the same time with a satyr. On Greek vases there are a few examples, or, to be more specific, five which Otto Jahn discussed many years ago,¹ and a very few others. On these vases the satyrs are shown either stealing the arms of the sleeping Heracles, or being pursued by him for so doing; and Jahn showed that the painters had in mind scenes from the satyr drama which regularly followed the tragic trilogy. The adventures of Heracles furnished the tragic poets with an abundance of capital situations for their satyr dramas, and that they made the most of them is apparent from the literature.² For example, we hear of a satyr play by Sophocles entitled Ἡρακλῆς ἐπὶ Ταυρόρῳ; of one by Astydamas called *Heracles*; and Heracles was undoubtedly one of the characters in three of the satyr plays of Euripides, the *Eurystheus*, the *Busiris*, and the *Syleus*; and very likely also in the *Omphale* of Achaëus. The list of satyr plays of which the titles have come down to modern times is not large, and Heracles can thus be shown with considerable probability to have had a part in no less than six of them. The presence of Heracles with the satyr, therefore, on this mirror is presumptive evidence that we have before us a scene from a satyr play in which Heracles had a part. The small winged Eros was, of course, not a character in the play, but was added by the artist to complete his picture. On a Greek vase a flute-player might well have taken his place. Such winged Erotes, it is hardly necessary to say, are very common on Etruscan mirrors.

But there is further evidence than that found in the subject to connect this scene with the satyr drama. There is in Athens a red-figured *deinos*, unfortunately partly broken, which once had in a band running round it nine figures engaged in performing a satyr play.³ There were two youths, a bearded flute-player,

¹ *Philologus*, XXVII, 1868, pp. 1-27. See also Heydemann, *Berl. Winckelmanns-Prog.* 30, 1870, pp. 8, 9. For another scene see Benndorf, *Griech. und Sicil. Vasenbilder.* pl. 44, and Baumeister, *Denkmäler*, p. 790, fig. 848.

² See Haigh, *Tragic Drama of the Greeks*, p. 393 f.

³ No. 1055 and pl. XVII in Nicole's *Catalogue des vases peints du musée national d'Athènes, Supplément*; also *Ath. Mitt.* XXXVI, 1911, pp. 269-277, pls. XIII and XIV.

and six actors costumed as satyrs (Fig. 3). It will be noticed that the position of the arms is almost identical with that of the satyr's arms on the mirror. That is, the right hand is raised and extended with the thumb separated from the fingers, while the left hand rests on the left hip. So, too, on the well-known crater of Pronomus in Naples,¹ which has upon it scenes of preparation



FIGURE 3.—DEINOS IN ATHENS

for a satyr play, one of the satyrs has the same attitude. Again the same position is to be seen in a satyr on the crater from Altamura in the British Museum;² and likewise on a crater at Deepdene.³ In fact this seems to have been a characteristic pose for the satyr of the satyr play as he danced up to some other character, and it is, therefore, a further proof that the scene on the mir-

¹ Baumeister, *Denkmäler*, pl. V. For the literature see *Ath. Mitt.* XXXVI, 1911, p. 271, note.

² A. B. Cook, *Zeus*, Vol. I, pl. XXXVIII.

³ *Ibid.*, pl. XXXIX.

ror goes back to such a source. I might add that the gesture with the right hand is also shown on a relief in Rome believed by Schreiber to represent a satyr play;¹ and perhaps also on two other similar reliefs.

Whether we are justified in going further and attempting to identify the play may, perhaps, be questioned, but there are certain possibilities which deserve to be considered. If the object between Heracles and the satyr is really meant for the stern of a boat, as I suppose it to be, it can hardly be intended for any other than the boat which was to convey Heracles across the Styx on the occasion of his journey to the lower world. That being the case, one thinks naturally of the *Heracles at Taenarum* of Sophocles, which dealt with that part of the hero's career. The possibilities for fun in depicting this expedition are easy to appreciate, even without the experience of Dionysus in the *Frogs* to help us; and in the light of the newly found *Ichneutae* the choice of such a subject by Sophocles does not seem surprising. But the few scanty fragments of the play which have come down to modern times do not permit us to go further than to suggest that the engraver of the mirror may have been directly or indirectly indebted to it for his subject.

Scenes from the Greek satyr plays are not numerous on the monuments. More of them appear on the vases than elsewhere; a few are found on sculptured reliefs;² and there are a very few scenes on Etruscan mirrors which may go back to the same source. The Philadelphia mirror, therefore, assumes an added importance. It is interesting also from the point of view of the date. In Greece the popularity of the satyr drama began to decline as early as the fourth century B.C.; but inscriptions found in many places prove that in certain localities it continued to be played as late as the first century A.D.³ In Italy the native farces such as the *Atellanae* seem largely to have taken its place. If we could be sure that the engraver of the mirror took his design from some performance which he had actually seen, we should have evidence that the satyr drama lingered on in Italy in spite of its local rivals as late as the third, or perhaps second, century B.C.; and al-

¹ *Abh. Sächs. Gesell.* XXVII, 1909, No. 22, pl. III. Cf. also pls. I and II, and fig. 3, p. 766. In this connection one may well ask whether the attitude of the Marsyas of Myron's famous group was not directly inspired by the satyr drama.

² See Schreiber, *op. cit.* pp. 761 ff.

³ Haigh, *op. cit.* p. 394, note 4.

though that is not improbable, the possibility always remains that he may have been copying from some pattern book or other source of earlier date.¹ In this respect, therefore, no definite conclusion can be reached; but it would seem that a connection between the design and the satyr drama was sufficiently established by the evidence.

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¹ If Heracles and a satyr were one of the stock subjects of the engravers of mirrors more examples would undoubtedly have been preserved. Pattern books must have been very nearly contemporary with the artists who used them, and an early motive would hardly survive unless it were popular.